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United States Coast Guard

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COMDTINST 16134.2C  
AUG 31 2007

## COMMANDANT INSTRUCTION 16134.2C

Subj: CUTTER SURFACE SWIMMER PROGRAM

Ref: (a) Navigation Rules, International - Inland COMDTINST M16672.2 (series)  
(b) Rescue and Survival Systems Manual, COMDTINST M10470.10 (series)  
(c) U. S. Coast Guard Maritime Law Enforcement Manual (MLEM), COMDTINST M16247.1 (series)  
(d) Naval Search and Rescue Manual, (NWP 3-50.1)  
(e) Cutter Training and Qualification Manual, COMDTINST M3502.4 (series)  
(f) Boat Crew Seamanship Manual, COMDTINST M16114.5 (series)

1. PURPOSE. This Instruction provides policies, procedures, guidance, and minimum standards for the training, qualification, certification and employment of Cutter Surface Swimmers (CSS).
2. ACTION. Area, district, and sector commanders, commanders of maintenance and logistics commands, commanding officers of integrated support commands, commanding officers of headquarters units, and assistant commandants for directorates, Judge Advocate General and special staff elements at Headquarters shall ensure compliance with the provisions of this Instruction or Notice or Manual. Internet release authorized.
3. DIRECTIVES AFFECTED. Cutter Surface Swimmer Program, COMDTINST 16134.2B is canceled.
4. DISCUSSION.
  - a. Cutter search and rescue operations, such as rescue and assistance, person in the water or man overboard recovery may require the use of the CSS. While personnel recovery via small boat is the preferred retrieval method of persons in the water, occasionally it may be necessary to deploy the CSS to assist survivors who are fatigued, entangled or injured.

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- b. The procedures, equipment, health and fitness prerequisites noted in this Instruction are minimum requirements. Commands are encouraged to fashion or engage in any available additional training opportunities to enhance their unit's swimmer program.
- c. Coast Guard cutters that operate primarily on the "Western Rivers," as defined in reference (a), would normally not deploy a CSS because of the risk posed by river currents, and as a result compliance with this Instruction is optional. However, if a cutter operating on the "Western Rivers" determines that it is necessary to maintain a CSS billet, the swimmer and tender must be certified in accordance with this Instruction.

5. POLICY.

- a. Flight deck equipped cutters shall, at a minimum, have two outfitted and certified Cutter Surface Swimmers onboard when the cutter is underway. Non flight deck equipped cutters shall, at a minimum, have one outfitted and certified Cutter Surface Swimmer onboard while the cutter is underway. A certified tender, in accordance with Enclosure (1) of this Instruction, must be assigned to each deployed cutter swimmer. Operational commanders may increase these requirements at their discretion.
- b. The decision to deploy the swimmer(s) rests with the commanding officer/officer in charge (CO/OIC).
- c. The principles of Operational Risk Management shall be followed prior to and during any swimmer deployment for both training and operational requirements.
- d. The CSS shall not enter the water without permission from the officer of the deck or, if deployed from the cutter's small boats, from the boat coxswain.
- e. The CSS has the authority to decline deployment if they believe the situation is beyond their capabilities.
- f. In accordance with reference (b), if the water temperature is less than or equal to 55 degrees Fahrenheit, the swimmer shall wear a dry suit and appropriate thermal layering.
- g. Drills should be conducted in the cutter's open water operating environment to acclimate the CSS to actual conditions. If a commanding officer or officer in charge chooses to execute live "victim" man overboard recovery drills for purposes of training the CSS, the following, at a minimum, shall be conducted.
  - (1) A cutter's small boat shall be launched and remain in the immediate vicinity of the "victim."
  - (2) The "victim" shall don appropriate flotation and hypothermia protective gear for the conditions present that meet or exceed the hypothermia protective gear requirement of the CSS.
  - (3) **The provisions of Chapter 2-60, Swimming, Shipboard Regulations Manual, M5000.7 must be met.**
  - (4) Under no circumstance shall a cutter make approaches on a live "victim" for drill purposes.

- (5) Under no circumstance shall a CSS or “victim” be deployed, from the cutter, while the cutter is underway making way.
- h. The swimmer shall be tended, via tending line, by the certified tender at all times. Only under compelling circumstances (e.g., entanglement in debris, embarking on a vessel or other unforeseen circumstances) may the swimmer detach himself from the tending line.
  - i. In accordance with reference (c), cutter swimmers shall not be deployed for a Person in the Water (PIW) to compel compliance in a law enforcement role.
  - j. The cutter swimmer shall not enter capsized hulls, airframes, submerged vessels or vehicles. If a swimmer determines that a person is trapped under or in any object, they may reach inside while maintaining a grasp on a reference point from the exterior of the object.
  - k. The vessel from which the swimmer is deployed must be aware of the swimmer’s position in relation to the ship at all times. The vessel should be kept as stationary as possible to prevent the swimmer from being dragged by the cutter. The swimmer must be kept clear of the screw(s), auxiliary propulsion, rudder(s), suction/discharge openings, and other hazards.
  - l. Each cutter shall develop and maintain a CSS pre-deployment checklist to ensure individual, unit specific, underwater hazards have been mitigated. This checklist shall at a minimum include securing sea suction/discharge valves, propellers and sonar if equipped. Destroy copies of the checklist upon completion of the drill or exercise. Destroy master when superseded or becomes obsolete.
  - m. If a PIW is uncooperative or combative, launching the cutter small boat or use of the second cutter swimmer, if available, may be necessary. The CSS should not be deployed independently for a combative PIW.
  - n. A cutter swimmer should be utilized in conjunction with the unit’s small boat for multiple persons in the water.
  - o. If the CSS is deployed from the ship’s small boat, the swimmer shall be tended by the tender just as if the CSS was deployed from the cutter.
  - p. A unit’s Health Services Technician (HS) and/or Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), particularly those on independent duty, shall not normally be assigned as the CSS. Although possibly beneficial, the cutter surface swimmer need not be trained in life support beyond Commandant’s Mandated Training. The CSS’s primary function is initial assessment and transport of the victim to the cutter for medical assistance.
  - q. A designated Safety Observer shall be on deck at all times while a CSS is deployed. The Safety Observer should have no additional duties except to facilitate communications with the bridge.
6. PROCEDURES. These procedures are generic in nature and intentionally describe only the swimmer’s and tender’s actions. Once in the water, a swimmer’s tactics and procedures remain the same throughout the fleet. Deployment and recovery of the swimmer is unique to each individual class of cutter.

- a. Upon receiving the word of man over board or use of the CSS is necessary both the CSS and Tender muster and dress out the swimmer. The goal should be manned, ready and on station in three minutes from initial notification.
- b. Once the swimmer has been deployed, the tender allows the swimmer to swim away from the vessel by providing slack in the tending line. The tending line must carefully be managed at all times to prevent fouling.
- c. The swimmer may push a ring or torpedo buoy while advancing to the person in the water. If using the ring buoy the line and light should be removed to avoid entangling the swimmer or victim.
- d. The swimmer should establish communications with the person in the water (PIW) to promote confidence, cooperation and to reduce the possibility of panic. The swimmer can then establish physical contact with the PIW. Reference (d) explains proper swimmer techniques for recovery of a person in the water.
- e. Once on scene with the PIW the swimmer should determine if any injuries exist that may determine how shipboard recovery of the victim should be completed.
- f. Visual, whistle and tug signals are an alternate method of communicating between the tender and swimmer and are similar to the Oxygen Breathing Apparatus / Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (OATH) signaling system. The descriptions and explanations of these signals are described in the table below.

| Meaning  | Whistle/Tugs | Visual Signal            |
|--|--------------|--------------------------|
| I am OK / Are you OK?                          | One          | Taps top of head         |
| Advance  | Two          | One arm raised over head |
| Take up slack / I am ready to return to vessel | Three        | One arm waving overhead  |
| Help / Do you need help?                       | Four         | Two arms waving overhead |

- g. Once the swimmer is ready to be hauled back, the swimmer signals the cutter. The tender pulls the tending line to assist the swimmer and victim in returning to the vessel. When returning to the vessel the swimmer should concentrate on the victim while the tender pulls them in. Swimmer tending lines must carefully be managed to prevent fouling especially when hauling back. The certified tender is responsible for managing the tether in the case of more than one tender on the line.

- h. Once alongside the cutter the, CSS and victim shall be recovered by whatever means available onboard that class of cutter.

## 7. CERTIFICATION.

- a. Qualification, and the training inherent in it, is the responsibility of each unit. General procedures for the certification of personnel are found in Chapter 5 reference (e). Prior to initial certification, the prospective cutter surface swimmer must:

(1) Complete the applicable sections of the Cutter Surface Swimmer PQS Enclosure (1).

(2) Demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of CSS policies and procedures to an oral examining board. The oral board will make a certification recommendation to the CO/OIC. Oral board members shall be designated in each unit's assignment to duties instruction.

- b. In addition to the initial certification requirements, cutter swimmers and tenders must complete annual and semi-annual refresher training per Enclosure (1). This currency/proficiency requirement assures the command that the individual stays proficient. Skills must be practiced on a regular basis for cutter swimmers to retain required levels of expertise. A swimmer failing health or fitness requirements during the semi-annual re-certification period shall not be re-certified until the failed requirement is successfully demonstrated.

## 8. EQUIPMENT.

- a. Standard Cutter Surface Swimmer gear, build-up, and maintenance (quarterly and semi-annual) can be found in reference (b).
- b. Individual class cutter requirements for deck equipment can be found in applicable Command Assessment Readiness and Training (CART) checklists, Special and Emergency Operations and Procedures (SEOPS) checklists and shipboard Allowance Equipage Lists (AEL).
- c. Swimmer tending lines shall be 600ft, 3/8" diameter, yellow, polypropylene line (SPEC MIL-R-24049). Cutters less than 179 feet may size the tending line to three times the length of the cutter.

- 9. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS. Environmental considerations were examined in the development of this Instruction and have been determined to be not applicable.

- 10. FORMS/REPORTS. None.

ROBERT C. PARKER /s/  
Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard  
Assistant Commandant for Capability (CG-7)

Encl: (1) Personnel Qualification Standard for Cutter Surface Swimmers

**PERSONNEL QUALIFICATION STANDARD FOR CUTTER SURFACE SWIMMERS**

101

**HEALTH AND FITNESS REQUIREMENTS**

After the health and fitness requirements have been satisfactorily completed, the trainee may proceed with the qualification. All Coast Guard cutter swimmers are required to meet the below prerequisites annually.

| <b>Push-ups</b> | <b>Sit-ups</b> | <b>Sit and Reach</b> | <b>12 Minute Swim</b> |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>29</b>       | <b>38</b>      | <b>16.5"</b>         | <b>500 yards</b>      |

\*Note: 12-minute swim test is based on Dr. Kenneth Cooper's research.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

201

**SAFETY FUNDAMENTALS**

201.1

Describe Commandant and unit policy concerning:

- a. Authority to deploy swimmer
- b. Swimmer's right to decline deployment
- c. Tethering of swimmer
- d. Capsized hulls, airframes, or submerged vehicles
- e. Running water, tidal currents, etc.
- f. Hazardous "own ship" areas that a swimmer should avoid
- g. Duties and responsibilities of tenders
- h. Care and inspection of cutter swimmer equipment

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)



## 202.1

- a. Hypothermia protective clothing
- b. Swimmer's mask
- c. Rescue fins
- d. Approved swimmer's harness/life vest/knife
- e. Tending line and reel
- f. Strobe light (optional equipment)
- g. 4" Chemical-light
- h. Signal whistle

203

## 203.1

- a. Non-tethered life ring
- b. Torpedo buoy
- c. Stokes litter
- d. Available flotation (small fenders, PFDS, life raft, etc.)
- e. Care and inspection of tending line and associated hardware

204

## 204.1

- Stokes litter
- Personnel retrieval line (PRL)
- Other (man overboard hoist, etc.)

2



**SWIMMER'S/TENDER'S COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS**

205.1 Demonstrate the communications signal system as it applies to cutter swimmers: (OATH: 1-OK, 2-Advance, 3-Take up Slack, 4-Help)

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

301 **WATCH STATION - CUTTER SWIMMER**

301.1 **INITIAL QUALIFICATION TASKS**

- a. Demonstrate/perform steps for each of the following tasks
- b. Explain the reasons for each step
- c. Demonstrate the control/coordination required
- d. Show knowledge of required safety precautions
- e. Demonstrate/simulate the required methods of communication

(Note: all in water tasks will be conducted in the proper swimmer outfit)

301.1.1 Dress out as cutter swimmer (don equipment in 3 minutes or less)

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

301.1.2 Swim out a minimum of 75 percent of tending line and retrieve a nonviolent, conscious, simulated victim. Use available flotation (life ring, buoy, etc) to tow simulated victim back to the vessel. The swimmer shall utilize visual/sound communication signals with the tender when applicable.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

301.1.3 Describe and demonstrate the listed release/escape methods in accordance with reference (d):

- a. Front head hold release
- b. Front head hold escape
- c. Rear head hold release
- d. Rear head hold escape

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

- 301.1.4 Use available flotation (life ring, buoy, etc.) to tow simulated victim back to the vessel.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

- 301.1.5 Swim out a minimum of 75 percent of tending line, and retrieve a simulated unconscious victim.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

- 301.1.6 Alongside the vessel, secure a victim in the stokes litter with tenders steadying the litter via tending lines.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

- 301.1.7 Rig simulated victim for recovery using all recovery systems available aboard the vessel.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

302 **ANNUAL CURRENCY MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS**

- 302.1 Health and Fitness Prerequisites

Complete Health and Fitness Prerequisites in Section 101

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

303 **SEMI-ANNUAL CURRENCY MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS**

- 303.1 While vessel is underway with all way off, perform the following personnel retrieval drills. Each swimmer and tender team shall utilize proper signals during each evolution.

a. Each swimmer shall perform the following tasks:

- 1) 301.1.2 Swim out and retrieve a nonviolent, conscious, simulated victim.
- 2) 301.1.6 Alongside the vessel, secure a victim in the stokes litter with tenders steadying the litter via tending lines.
- 3) 301.1.7 Rig simulated victim for recovery using all recovery systems available aboard vessel.
- 4) Exercise each available method of ship deck recovery of surface swimmer in accordance with reference (d) and (f).
- 5) Describe and demonstrate the listed release/escape methods in accordance with reference (d).

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

304 **WATCH STATION - SWIMMER TENDER**

a. Tenders shall complete swimmer PQS, 201 through 205.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

304.1 **INITIAL QUALIFICATION TASKS**

For optimum training effectiveness, the above PQS items should be completed prior to starting your assigned tasks.

304.1.1 Assist the cutter swimmer in dressing out.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

304.1.2 Demonstrate proper line tending techniques.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

304.1.3 Tend the cutter swimmer during a drill scenario.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)

305 **SEMI-ANNUAL CURRENCY MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS**

305.1 While vessel is underway with all way off, perform the following personnel retrieval drills. Each swimmer and tender team shall utilize proper signals during each evolution.

a. Each tender shall perform the following tasks:

- 1) 304.1.2 Demonstrate proper line tending techniques.
- 2) 304.1.3 Tend the cutter swimmer during a drill scenario.

Completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(First Lieutenant Signature) (Date)